

Lanzarote transcript

Bonjour!

Today I'm going to talk to you about the Canary Islands. What, what's that to do with French you're going to say; you thought they spoke Spanish there, didn't you? Well you're right, some of you might already have been on holiday to one of these thirteen volcanic Spanish islands lying off the coast of Africa, such as Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Lanzarote or Fuerteventura. Very Spanish places aren't they, or are they?

Today I'm going to explain the connection between the Canary Islands, your favourite beauty products and France. Non, non. Je ne plaisante pas. Écoutez!

The year is 1402, Jean de Béthencourt is a nobleman from Normandy, a region in the North West of France, he is a businessman who has run out of money and has heard that great fortunes can be made sailing down the Atlantic Ocean. He is involved in textile and dye work and has learnt that there are islands near the coast of Africa where special plants grow which can be used to make a red dye for the clothing industry.

In order to finance his expedition, Jean de Béthencourt goes to see the French King, Charles VI, to whom he is quite close. In return for a lot of money, Jean de Béthencourt promises the King he will claim any island he discovers on behalf of the French Crown. What a great opportunity for the King of France.

Now, as it happens, the kingdom of France is in the middle of the 100 years war against England and as a consequence has very little money to spare, and so it is that Charles VI of France turns down the offer. Jean de Béthencourt however decides to carry on his dreams of adventure and fortune and knocks on the door of the Spanish King instead.

The Spanish king, Henri III de Castille, is very rich and he can tell that this is a great opportunity, he helps Jean de Béthencourt equip new boats for his expedition. And so it is that in 1402 Jean de Béthencourt, a French man, claims the island of Lanzarote, Fuerteventura and El Hierro for the count of the Spanish crown and the rest is history as they say.

Funny to think that we could all be speaking français on our next visit to the Canaries.

As for Jean de Béthencourt, he did indeed amass a great fortune selling his red dyes but where is the connection with your favourite beauty products, you will ask? Well, Jean de Béthencourt, despite his wealth, is not the richest nor indeed the most famous Béthencourt in history.

Very recently, someone from his family made even more money and in the same line of business. Her name is Liliane Bettencourt, the richest woman in France, she is one of the main owners of L'Oreal who manufactures dyes to colour your hair.

Now, as L'Oreal would say, it was all worth it.

Au revoir.